Pergamon

Tetrahedron Letters 39 (1998) 79–82

TETRAHEDRON LETTERS

Enantioselective Synthesis of 4-Substituted 2-Pyrrolidinones by Site-selective C-H Insertion of α-Methoxycarbonyl-α-diazoacetanilides Catalyzed by Dirhodium(II) Tetrakis[*N*-phthaloyl-(*S*)-*tert*-leucinate]

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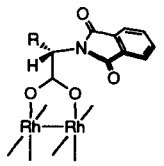
Received 29 September 1997; revised 20 October 1997; accepted 22 October 1997

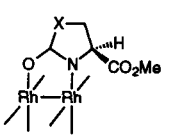
Abstract: *Site- and enantioselective intramolecular C-H insertion of α-methoxycarbonyl-α-diazoacetamides has been achieved by exploiting a p-nitrophenyl group as the N-substituent and dirhodium(II) tetrakis[N-phthaloyl-(S)-tert-leucinate] as catalyst, leading to the formation of 4-substituted 2-pyrrolidinone derivatives of up to 82% ee. The efficiency of the present protocol has been verified well by a short-step synthesis of (R)-(-)-baclofen.*

Enantioselective C-H insertion reaction of α-diazo carbonyl compounds catalyzed by chiral dirhodium(II) complexes is rapidly becoming recognized as a potentially powerful means for the construction of both carbocyclic and heterocyclic systems in optically active form.[1] Our efforts in this area have led to the development of dirhodium(II) carboxylates incorporating *N*-phthaloyl-(*S*)-amino acids as the bridging ligands, which catalyze intramolecular C-H insertion reactions of α-diazo carbonyl compounds site-selectively to give optically active cyclopentanone, 2-indanone, and 2-azetidinone derivatives with up to 80%, 98%, and 74% ee, respectively.[2-4] As a logical extension of our studies, we have addressed enantioselective construction of 4-substituted 2-pyrrolidinones *via* a site-selective C-H insertion process.

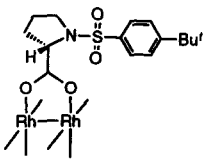
Apart from enantiocontrol, site-control has remained a major challenge in the enantioselective construction of heterocycles *via* an intramolecular C-H insertion process in an acyclic system. It is well documented that site-selectivities in the rhodium(II)-catalyzed C-H insertion reaction of α-diazo amides are highly dependent on the α-substituents of the diazo carbon as well as the *N*-substituents on the amide moiety.[5,6] For example, cyclization of *N*-alkyl-*N*-*tert*-butyl-α-diazoacetamides pioneered by Doyle and his coworkers with Rh_2(5*S*-MEPY)$_4$ and Rh_2(4*S*-MEOX)$_4$ gave a mixture of 2-pyrrolidinone and 2-azetidinone derivatives of up to 71% and 80% ee, respectively, with the former being favored.[7] In this context, we demonstrated that Rh_2(*S*-PTPA)$_4$-catalyzed cyclization of *N*-alkyl-*N*-*tert*-butyl-α-methoxycarbonyl-α-diazoacetamides led to the exclusive formation of 2-azetidinone derivatives of up to 74% ee.[4] On the other hand, Wee and his coworkers recently reported that $Rh_2(OAc)_4$-catalyzed cyclization of *N*-alkyl-*N*-*p*-methoxyphenyl-α-alkoxycarbonyl-α-diazoacetamides bearing a chiral auxiliary alcohol resulted in the predominant or exclusive formation of 2-



R = Me: Rh_2(*S*-PTA)$_4$, R = Bn: Rh_2(*S*-PTPA)$_4$
R = *i*-Pr: Rh_2(*S*-PTV)$_4$, R = *t*-Bu: Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$



X = CH_2: Rh_2(5*S*-MEPY)$_4$
X = O: Rh_2(4*S*-MEOX)$_4$

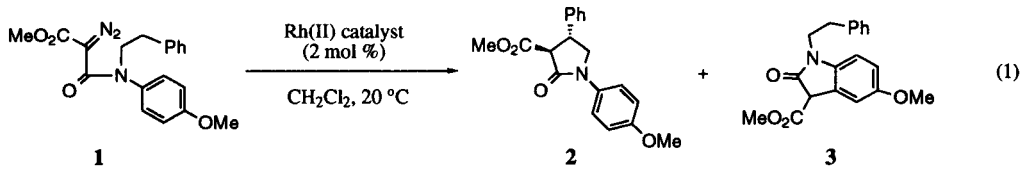


Rh_2(*S*-TBSP)$_4$

0040-4039/98/$19.00
PII: S0040-4039(97)10493-2

pyrrolidinone derivatives of up to 98% de, wherein the *N*-*p*-methoxyphenyl substituent played a dual role as a practical nitrogen protective group as well as a site-control element.[6,8]

Inspired by Wee's site- and diastereoselective construction of 4-substituted 2-pyrrolidinones, we initially explored cyclization of *N*-phenylethyl-*N*-*p*-methoxyphenyl-α-methoxycarbonyl-α-diazoacetamide (**1**) with the aid of 2 mol % of Rh_2(*S*-PTPA)$_4$ (eq 1). While $Rh_2(OAc)_4$-catalyzed cyclization of **1** afforded *trans*-3-methoxycarbonyl-4-phenyl-2-pyrrolidinone **2**[6,9] *via* aliphatic C-H insertion and 2(3*H*)-indolinone **3** *via* aromatic C-H insertion in 64% and 12% yields, respectively, Rh_2(*S*-PTPA)$_4$-catalysis of **1** was found to produce **3** in 68% yield along with less than 5% of **2**. No trace of 2-azetidinone derivatives could be detected in either case. The difference in predominant insertion sites with $Rh_2(OAc)_4$ and Rh_2(*S*-PTPA)$_4$ can be rationalized by assuming that aromatic C-H insertion proceeds *via* an electrophilic addition of the rhodium(II) carbene carbon to the aromatic ring rather than *via* a direct C-H insertion mechanism as pointed out by ourselves and other groups,[3a,10-12] wherein aliphatic C-H insertion is presumed to be more sensitive to nonbonding interactions with the bridging ligands on the rhodium relative to aromatic C-H insertion.

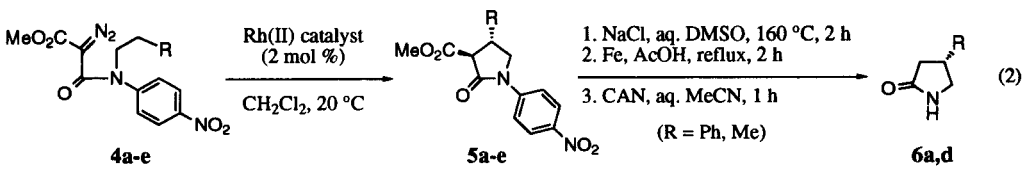


1 **2** **3**

	2	**3**
$Rh_2(OAc)_4$	64%	12%
Rh_2(*S*-PTPA)$_4$	<5%	68%

(1)

At this point, we envisaged that, by switching the substituent at the para position on the benzene ring from the electron-donating methoxy group to the electron-withdrawing nitro group, formation of 2(3*H*)-indolinones *via* an electrophilic aromatic substitution-type reaction could be suppressed in favor of the ring closure leading to 2-pyrrolidinones. Indeed, we found that cyclization of *N*-phenylethyl-*N*-*p*-nitrophenyl-α-methoxycarbonyl-α-diazoacetamide (**4a**) in the presence of Rh_2(*S*-PTPA)$_4$ gave exclusively *trans*-3-methoxycarbonyl-4-phenyl-2-pyrrolidinone **5a**[9] in 82% yield, with no trace of 2(3*H*)-indolinone or 2-azetidinone derivatives (eq 2). The



4a-e **5a-e** **6a,d**

(2)

a: R = Ph, **b**: R = *p*-$MeOC_6H_4$, **c**: R = *p*-$NO_2C_6H_4$, **d**: R = Me, **e**: R = Et

enantioselectivity in this reaction was determined to be 47% ee by ^{1}H NMR spectroscopy using Eu(hfc)$_3$ as a chiral shift reagent.[13] The preferred absolute configuration at the insertion site was established as *R* by its transformation [(1) NaCl, aq. DMSO, 160 °C, 2 h; (2) Fe,[14] AcOH, reflux, 2 h; (3) ceric ammonium nitrate (CAN),[15] MeCN] to the known 4-phenyl-2-pyrrolidinone (**6a**), $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ -17.9 (*c* 1.07, MeOH) [lit.,[16] $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ -37.8 (*c* 0.95, MeOH) for (*R*)-**6a**]; undoubtedly, the above % ee value was virtually consistent with that based on the optical rotation value. We next screened other chiral dirhodium(II) carboxylates, Rh_2(*S*-PTA)$_4$, Rh_2(*S*-PTV)$_4$, Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$, and Rh_2(*S*-TBSP)$_4$[17], and the results are summarized in Table 1. While a consistent sense of enantioselection was observed in all cases, % ee values were dependent on the catalyst. Of dirhodium(II) carboxylates incorporating *N*-phthaloyl-(*S*)-amino acids, Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$ characterized by a bulky *tert*-butyl group proved to be the catalyst of choice for displaying the highest degree of enantioselectivity (74% ee, entry 4), though we cannot presently rationalize the effect of the bridging ligands on the degree of enantioselection. It is worthy of note that the enantioselectivity observed with Rh_2(*S*-TBSP)$_4$ developed by

Davies[17] was 6% ee (entry 5), suggesting the unique ability of our dirhodium(II) complexes.[18]

With the effectiveness of Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$ as the catalyst identified, we then explored cyclization of α-diazoacetanilides **4b-e** possessing substituents other than a phenyl group at the insertion site. The results are summarized in Table 2. While the same sense of enantioselection as that with **4a** was observed in every case, the aryl group at the insertion site was found to exhibit much higher enantioselectivities than the alkyl group (73-81% ee vs 33-34% ee, entries 1-3 vs 4 and 5). We previously observed similar substituent effects in enantioselective synthesis of 3-substituted cyclopentanones *via* C-H insertion, where the introduction of an electron-donating methoxy group at the para position on the benzene ring sharply diminished the enantioselectivity.[2b] In the present reaction, however, a little variation in enantioselectivities was observed by the introduction of electron-donating or electron-withdrawing groups on the benzene ring (entries 1-3), which provides added flexibility in the present protocol.

Table 1. Enantioselective Intramolecular C-H Insertion of α-Diazoacetamide **4a** Catalyzed by Chiral Rh(II) Catalyst

entry	Rh(II) catalyst	time, h	% yield[a]	% ee[b]	config[c]
1	Rh_2(*S*-PTPA)$_4$	4	82	47	3*S*, 4*R*
2	Rh_2(*S*-PTA)$_4$	5	83	47	3*S*, 4*R*
3	Rh_2(*S*-PTV)$_4$	3	82	26	3*S*, 4*R*
4	Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$	5	80	74	3*S*, 4*R*
5	Rh_2(*S*-TBSP)$_4$	4	87	6	3*S*, 4*R*

[a]Isolated yield. [b]Determined by ^{1}H NMR analysis using Eu(hfc)$_3$ as a chiral shift reagent. [c]See the text.

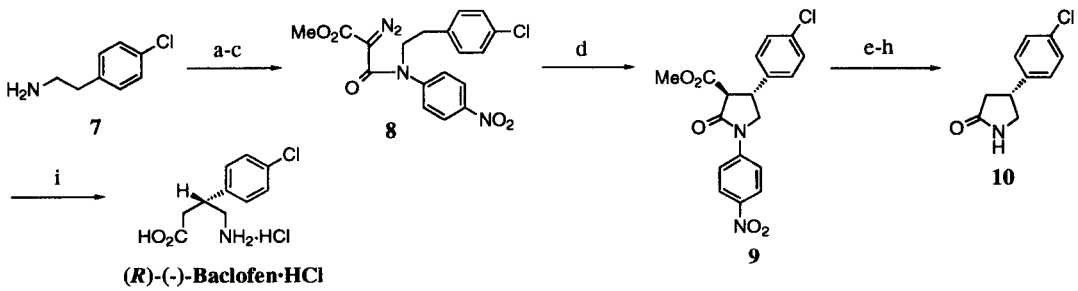
Table 2. Enantioselective Synthesis of 4-Substituted 2-Pyrrolidinones Catalyzed by Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$

	substrate			2-pyrrolidinones				
entry		R	time, h		% yield[a]	$[\alpha]_D$ (*c*, $CHCl_3$)	% ee[b]	config
1	**4a**	Ph	5	**5a**	80	+7.18 (1.12)	74	3*S*, 4*R*[c]
2	**4b**	*p*-$MeOC_6H_4$	4	**5b**	72	+12.6 (1.17)	81	(3*S*, 4*R*)[d]
3	**4c**	*p*-$NO_2C_6H_4$	8	**5c**	81	+14.0 (1.05)	73	(3*S*, 4*R*)[d]
4	**4d**	Me	3	**5d**	82	-2.11 (1.06)	33	3*S*, 4*S*[e]
5	**4e**	Et	4	**5e**	84	-4.67 (1.07)	34	(3*S*, 4*S*)[d]

[a]Isolated yield. [b]Determined by ^{1}H NMR analysis using Eu(hfc)$_3$ as a chiral shift reagent. [c]See the text. [d]Assigned by analogy. [e]The preferred absolute configuration at insertion site of **5d** was established as *S* by its transformation to the known (*S*)-4-methyl-2-pyrrolidinone. See ref 19.

Finally, we applied the present method to the synthesis of (*R*)-(-)-baclofen, a typical $GABA_B$ receptor agonist (Scheme 1).[20] There have recently been reported a number of syntheses of (*R*)-(-)-baclofen *via* chemoenzymatic[21] and diastereoselective[22] approaches, but a catalytic, enantioselective synthesis has not yet been addressed. Toward this end, *N*-2-(*p*-chlorophenyl)ethyl-*N*-*p*-nitrophenyl-α-methoxycarbonyl-α-diazoacetamide (**8**) was prepared from commercially available 2-(*p*-chlorophenyl)ethylamine (**7**) by condensation with 4-fluoronitrobenzene[23] followed by *N*-acylation and subsequent diazo transfer in 87% overall yield. Cyclization of **8** with the aid of 2 mol % of Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$ proceeded uneventfully to afford the desired 2-pyrrolidinone **9**, $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ +16.8 (*c* 0.85, $CHCl_3$), in 83% yield, the enantioselectivity of which was determined to be 82% ee by ^{1}H NMR spectroscopy using Eu(hfc)$_3$ as a chiral shift reagent. Successive removal of the methoxycarbonyl and *p*-nitrophenyl groups from **9** furnished the known lactam **10**, mp 108-115 °C, $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ -33.4 (*c* 1.01, EtOH), in 76% yield, which, upon one recrystallization from AcOEt-hexane, produced the optically pure sample, mp 113-114 °C , $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ -39.1 (*c* 1.03, EtOH) [lit.,[22b] mp 112 °C, $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ -39 (*c* 1, EtOH) for (*R*)-**10**] in 79% yield. Acidic hydrolysis of **10** afforded (*R*)-(-)-baclofen as its hydrochloride, mp 214-215 °C (dec), $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ -1.42 (*c* 1.12, H_2O) [lit.,[24] mp 215 °C (dec), $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ -1.4 (*c* 1, H_2O)].

In summary, we have achieved the first catalytic, enantioselective synthesis of 4-aryl-substituted 2-pyrrolidinones of up to 82% ee *via* Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$-mediated C-H insertion of α-methoxycarbonyl-α-diazoacetamides, wherein the dual role of the *N*-*p*-nitrophenyl substitutent as a practical nitrogen protective group as



Scheme 1. *Reagents and conditions*: (a) 4-fluoronitrobenzene, K_2CO_3, EtOH, 160 °C, 18 h, 95%; (b) MeO_2CCH_2COCl, Et_3N, CH_2Cl_2, 0 °C, 2 h, 96%; (c) *p*-acetamidobenzenesulfonyl azide, DBU, MeCN, 0 °C, 3 h, 95%; (d) Rh_2(*S*-PTTL)$_4$ (2 mol %), CH_2Cl_2, 23 °C, 6 h, 83% (82% ee); (e) NaCl, aq. DMSO, 160 °C, 2 h, 96%; (f) Fe, AcOH, reflux, 2 h, 97%; (g) CAN, MeCN, H_2O, 0 °C, 1.5 h, 81%; (h) recrystallization from AcOEt-*n*-hexane (>99% ee), 79%; (i) 6N HCl, reflux, 6 h, 74%.

well as a site-control element has proven to be crucial to the success. The efficiency of the present protocol has been verified well by a short-step synthesis of (*R*)-(-)-baclofen, thus providing great potential for a facile access to its novel analogues for biological and pharmacological investigations.[25]

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25. This research was supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research on Priority Areas from the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, Japan and also by the Special Coordination Funds of the Science and Technology Agency of the Japanese Government. The authors thank the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for Research Fellowships for Young Scientists (to M. A.).